

STUDY SEVEN — GENESIS 20  
FALTERING FAITH

# P R O M I S E

— G E N E S I S 12 - 25 —

GOD'S GRACIOUS INITIATIVE  
IN THE LIFE & TIMES OF ABRAHAM

## OVERVIEW

**Genesis 20:1-7** – The chapter begins with Abraham pushing south, he begins in the southern desert region of the Negev and then goes even further to Kadesh (in the northern region of the Sinai peninsula). He then doubles back to Gerar. As a nomad, he lacked the usual protections of clan structure and local rulers and so was naturally vulnerable as his household made such journeys.

Despite having just received the promise that Sarah will bear a son in a year (Genesis 18), Abraham threatens to derail God's plans almost immediately by again passing off Sarah as his sister.<sup>1</sup> In so doing, he mirrors his earlier failure in Egypt and reveals a habitual (v 13) sinful propensity to 'help' God's promises along through his own cunning, and in so doing, reveals a heart that does still not fully trust God.

Mercifully, God restrains Abimelech from sleeping with Sarah (v 6) – another signal of God's sovereign power in all situations. Knowledge of such sovereign power should inform our prayers when praying with concern for others caught up in sinful patterns of behaviour.

**Genesis 20:8-18** – Ironically, though Abraham thought that the residents of Gerar lacked a fear of God, the response of Abimelech and the officials prove otherwise (perhaps a caution against assuming the worst or being pessimistic when sharing the gospel with unbelievers!). Indeed, their righteous and earnest response expose Abraham's own lack of fear and reverence – for had Abraham appropriately feared the Lord, he wouldn't have felt the need to lie about Sarah in the first place.

Furthermore this fear led Abraham to fail in his Godly leadership and encouragement of Sarah – in the name of 'love' (v 13) he convinces her to become complicit in his lack of faith. Yet God doesn't give up on Abraham and uses him to bring resolution and great blessing to the situation. This is an encouragement for all of us as we falter in our faith, as Iain Duguid (p 128) powerfully observes -

*'God's ability to use even our sins for his own purposes shows that he doesn't love us simply for the great things we can do for him. All too often we think that in order for God really to love us, we must live an epic life of grand achievement...we typically focus on external achievements as the way to win God's approval: we want to attempt great things for him. The Bible, however, focuses on the internals: God's work of creating a great heart in us characterized by humility, gentleness, patience and love.'*

<sup>1</sup> Which turns out to be a half-truth (20:12) – 'Interestingly, such a marriage was prohibited by later Mosaic Law (Lev 20:9). Since God blesses his marriage with Sarah, it is unlikely that such a marriage was considered wrong at this time. Indeed, this marriage, out of keeping with later Israelite sensibilities, provides an argument against attempts to late date the writing of the patriarchal narratives.' (Longman, 263).

## PROMISE+FULFILMENT INTERCESSOR

Abraham is the first person in Scripture to receive the title of Prophet. Though we usually associate such an office with one who speaks oracles on behalf of God to His people, here we see that one core prophetic function is to intercede with God on behalf of his people.

Abraham has already done that with respect to Lot and Sodom (Genesis 18), and is formally called to do so with respect to Abimelech and his household.

After the prophet Abraham, came the prophet Moses, who also interceded with God on behalf of his people. Yet Moses still looked forward to a future prophet –

*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. Deut 18:15*

This long awaited prophet is none other than Abraham's promised Seed – Jesus. Of him we read,

*Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Hebrews 7:25*

He is the perfect intercessor for us. His eternal nature means he is ever present to intercede for us in the courts of heaven, and his perfect righteousness secures his standing before God and makes sufficient atonement for our sins.

The household of Abimelech found physical healing through Abraham's intercession, we find healing from our sins in Christ.

## GETTING STARTED

1. Are there areas in your life where you are a creature of habit?

## INTO THE TEXT

### Read Genesis 20:1-7

2. What are the similarities between this episode and Abraham's earlier failure in Egypt?
3. Given recent events, what makes Abraham's actions particularly reprehensible in this instance?
4. Who is it that keeps Abimelech from sin and how might our knowledge of this inform our prayer lives?
5. The severity of the Lord's threats to Abimelech reveals the God-ordained sanctity of marriage. How might we better uphold this sanctity together as God's people?

### Read Genesis 20:8-18

6. What fear led Abraham to persuade Sarah to pretend that she was his sister, not his wife? Why was that fear unfounded?<sup>2</sup>
7. How might Abraham's intercession and the Lord's answer have been both painful and encouraging for Sarah?
8. Abraham's failure is not isolated (v 13). What encouragement is there in this passage for us who wrestle with habitual sins?
9. How does Abraham the prophet anticipate the future office and work of Jesus?

## TAKEAWAY

10. Share with the group any failures or disappointments you've experienced in bringing appropriate honour and glory to the Lord before others. Pray for each other that God would grow our hearts through such failures and glorify his name nonetheless.

---

<sup>2</sup> Question sourced from Duguid, 129.